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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ITALIAN FRONT

AN important article by Professor Robert DeC. Ward, of Harvard University, printed in the February issue of *THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY*, treats the weather controls over the fighting in the Italian war zone. The number of the *Geographical Journal* for the same month contains an address of equal interest before the Royal Geographical Society by Major De Felippi on the relation of the geography of the region to the war. In discussing this address, the president of the society said that if the conduct of the war should be placed in the hands of the Royal Geographical Society, he doubted whether they would succeed in doing anything better than making a very considerable muddle of it. But it is none the less true that weather, climate and topography are fundamental factors in military operations.

Major De Felippi pointed out that the Italian-Austrian political frontier is 470 miles long, and the boundary line is so drawn that Austria holds the headwaters and upper courses of every one of the Italian rivers. There is not a small valley which is not held by Austria to within a short distance of its opening upon the plain. Austria possesses the whole basin of the Isonzo from its source to the sea. The political boundary bears no relation to any of the geographical features of the land. An equally important topographical feature of the frontier is the fact that with the longer stretch extending in a general direction from the west to east and the shorter section extending from north to south, the Italian army was always in danger of a flank attack.

When Italy attacked Austria, it could only advance in the Isonzo region, but every door leading into Italy was open to Austria. Thus in May, 1916, Austria attacked the

Italian left flank on the tableland of Asiago, where, if it had succeeded, the rearguard of the Italian army would have been cut, with Venice only forty miles away.

With the exception of this attack on the Asiago plateau, the military effort has been continuously employed on the eastern front. It was by far the most important, for here only was it possible to accomplish the objects which the Italians had in view. But the whole Isonzo basin was interposed between the frontier and the watershed and the advance could be made only with the greatest difficulties. The character of this region is shown in the two photographs which were exhibited by Major De Felippi and are reproduced from the report of his lecture. It was in the region of the Isonzo, shown in these pictures, that the German and Austrian troops attacked at the end of last October. Above Gorizia the Isonzo flows from north to south in a long narrow winding defile, which widens out at three points where side valleys reach it at Plezzo, Caporetto and Tolmino. These widenings of the valley were the scenes of the Austrian and German attack, through which their armies moved forward into the plains of Italy.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE WAR

PLANS have been completed for the great enlargement of facilities for training and equipping the aerial photographic force for photographing the German trenches from the skies and keeping up to the last minute the large composite picture of the whole German front. Future facilities will be three times those at present existing and will be in full operation in April.

The three schools now operating at Langley Field, Fort Sill, and Cornell will be consolidated into one large school of aerial photography